

Gaslit Nation Transcript

28 September 2022

“Defiance”

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/defiance-72560469>

[intro - audio excerpt from Sarah’s book, *They Knew*]

Sarah Kendzior (00:00):

When the pandemic began, my husband and children and I began gathering together each night to watch old sci-fi shows. We did this to establish a family routine because time had lost all meaning, but also because we found comfort in fictional dystopias. Outrageous plots had become relatable. We started with *Lost*, the story of confused people trapped in a place they cannot leave while being bombarded with surreal crises, fomented by a variety of conspiratorial madmen. We continued with *Fringe*, *The Twilight Zone*, and the short-lived 1991 children's series, *Erie, Indiana*. One night we watched an *Erie, Indiana* episode about a man called “The Donald” who comes to town posing as a successful businessman, turns people into zombies through subliminal advertising, and tries to steal their souls because he doesn't have one of his own. “The Donald”, revealed to be the devil in disguise, is defeated by his most feared nemesis, the IRS.

Sarah Kendzior (01:15):

In the early 1990s, Donald Trump being a consummate tax cheat was so well known that children were expected to understand it as an in-joke. My own children got the reference instantly in 2021, just as I had as a child when it originally aired. Meanwhile, on cable, reality took a holiday with deja news continuing unabated even as administrations changed. Trump's tax dodging was reported as a shocking breaking story while his actual tax returns remained hidden, first by Trump's Secretary of the Treasury, Steve Mnuchin, and then by Biden's Secretary of the Treasury, Janet Yellen. We were watching old fiction while living real life reruns. While *Lost* proved relatable and *Erie, Indiana* educational, my ultimate plague comfort TV show was the *X Files*, because of its wild conceit that competent people work at the FBI. “Time for civics class!” I would yell to the kids, and we would gather together to watch the opening credits mantras.

Sarah Kendzior (02:32):

The truth is out there. Trust no one, deny everything. Fight the future. These were the baseline beliefs of the 1990s, when distrusting authority was common and then commodified. I had just turned 15 when the *X Files* debuted, putting me at the tail end of its Gen-X target audience. I have wondered if Gen-Xers are more to conspiracy theories and possibly more adept at deciphering them because they grew up in an era of information scarcity and enjoyed the process of search and discovery. The last generation to have an analog childhood, we spent our youth hunting down obscure movies, music and magazines, developing selective expertise and curated collections. Building up that knowledge was beyond a hobby for many. It was a journey. We were raised in an era of ubiquitous corruption and lies; Watergate and Vietnam in the 1970s, Iran Contra and white-collar crime in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Sarah Kendzior (03:47):

When you combine political cynicism with an obsessive urge to track things down, you wind up with a bootle culture of information exchange. Now that there is minimal effort required to get even the most obscure pop culture, Gen-Xers have become hipsters of conspiracy, losing themselves in state secrets and creating communities of like-minded individuals stymied in their quests for the truth. This

undertaking can of course go awry. Obsessive information analysis is what QAnon does as well and members of Gen-X flood its ranks. MAGA and QAnon rallies may well be filling in for the cheap concerts and high octane events that Gen-Xers—and Boomers, for that matter—grew up thinking would last forever.

Announcer (04:46):

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[end audio excerpt]

[intro - theme music]

Sarah Kendzior (05:05):

I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the bestsellers, *The View from Flyover Country* and *Hiding In Plain Sight* and of the new book, *They Knew: How a Culture of Conspiracy Keeps America Complacent*, which is out right now and which you heard an excerpt of at the opening of the show.

Andrea Chalupa (05:23):

I'm Andrea Chalupa, a journalist in filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine, a book—a book [laughs]. I'm on book mode 'cause of Sarah—a film that the Kremlin doesn't want you to see. They keep shutting down screenings.

Sarah Kendzior (05:46):

And this is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the United States and rising autocracy around the world. I'm just gonna give a very quick announcement, book tour related thing. I'm traveling all over the place because of *They Knew*, and so I'm going to be in Columbus, Ohio on September 28th and then I'm going to Calgary for Wordfest. I'll be doing two presentations over the weekend. So if you're in Columbus or in Calgary, please come by.

Andrea Chalupa (06:16):

And you have a shot to come on our show, *Gaslit Nation*, and hang out with us. We are calling on our listeners to tweet at @GaslitNation on Twitter and let us know what you're doing this all-important election season to help get out the vote. From the submissions that we get—just people tweeting at us just saying, “Hey, here's what I'm doing to get out the vote in my community”—we're gonna select around five people and invite you on *Gaslit Nation*. We'll all get together and talk about what we did, what our experiences were like, how they informed us as citizens, inspired us, and so on. I myself am going to be making for my own personal goal a thousand phone calls this year. I'm gonna start by making phone calls for Reverend Rafael Warnock in Georgia, Stacey Abrams in Georgia. Tim Ryan in—

Sarah Kendzior (07:11):

Ohio.

Andrea Chalupa (07:11):

[laughs] Ohio. I'm Mandela Barnes in Wisconsin, Val Demings in Florida, and I'm gonna find a bunch of House candidates also to make phone calls to.

Sarah Kendzior:
Fetterman.

Andrea Chalupa:

Fetterman, of course, in Pennsylvania and Mark Kelly in Arizona. If we fight like hell, if you join me in making phone calls, if you set yourself a personal goal that's big and crazy—like a thousand, right?—you may not get that goal 'cause it's a lot, but you might get very close to it. You might do more phone calls than you thought you could. That's the whole point of big old moonshots. And so you shoot for the moon, you land in the stars. That's what we're doing, [laughs]. And so just tweet at us, tell us what you're doing and from those tweets we receive, five folks will come on the show and hang out with us and do an episode of *Gaslit Nation*.

Andrea Chalupa (07:56):

It's always a lot of fun and it's some of our favorite episodes that we've done since start the show. The other way you can get involved with us and hang out in spirit, in ghostly, goblin-ey spirit, is by submitting a Halloween-themed radio play which we're going to produce into a creepy, crawly radio show. And you're prompt is capturing the mood in this country, the big Posh Trump monsters that lurk among us; Ivanka, Jared, whatever you feel like writing about, just get it out there in the form of a ghost story around a campfire. Submit that to us at our email account, gaslitnation@gmail.com. Gaslitnation@gmail.com. And we will produce one of those shows and run it around Halloween in time for Ivanka's birthday.

Sarah Kendzior (08:47):

Very, very, very spooky stuff. Like I said, I've been on tour so we're kind of just freewheeling it here today on *Gaslit Nation*. And I just have some thoughts about our upcoming midterm elections and also what's happening in Iran because as we've seen over the last few weeks, there have been record protests, at least the biggest protests since 2009 against the dictatorial bureaucracy of Iran. And they've been primarily led by very young women, by women in their teens, in their early twenties. They were prompted by the assassination of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who had been detained by Iran's morality police for, as they say, "improperly wearing her hijab." We've seen a lot of women rejecting the hijab, showing their hair in defiance of the Iranian theocratic police state.

Sarah Kendzior (09:46):

And, of course, this is similar in many ways to the debates we're having as American women who have lost our bodily autonomy. It's choice. It's a choice to wear a hijab. It's a choice to do what you want to do with your own body, with your own sense of self, to present yourself to the world as you please and to control your own behavior and actions and not have to be subservient. And so it's very moving to see all of these women, especially these young women, standing up and risking their lives. It's also chilling to think how long this theocratic state has lasted. It's been there since Andrea and I were born. And of course back in 1979, people thought this may be a passing thing, a temporary thing, and they're still dealing with these problems.

Sarah Kendzior (10:36):

So that brings me to the topic of the fact that—on paper, at least—Iran is a democracy. Iran has a parliament. Iran has elections. Iran has term limits. The problem is Iran also has a supreme leader, an ayatollah, that controls the judiciary, chooses the judges of that judiciary branch. At least their fanatical,

theocratic brutal judges at least rotate. Ours are entrenched for life. But I think Iran offers a very valuable lesson in the different ways that governments can assert power, that you don't always have electoral autocracy, which is what brought in Hitler and Mussolini and, you know, if we're going to pretend that the 2016 election was fully legitimate, brought in Trump, a proto autocrat. This is when the people vote into power somebody who intends to subjugate them and strip them of their rights.

Sarah Kendzior (11:41):

But it is through an election. It is not always that. It is sometimes the judiciary that act as the cage bars of democracy. And that's been steadily increasing in the United States. And so as we move into the midterms—and obviously you should vote and you should try to change the balance of power, particularly in the Senate, you know, let's remind the Democrats have the House, the Senate, and the presidency, and have not been able to pass the majority of things that Biden ran on. They have been able to pass some things, but there have been a lot of losses along the way. And of course the biggest losses came not from Congress, but from the Supreme Court, from the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*. And you're going to see more losses over the next few weeks. Imani Gandy, who we had on the show previously, who warned that *Roe* would be repealed years in advance is warning that this may be the most brutal Supreme Court term in recent history of this country, and that democracy may not survive it.

Sarah Kendzior (12:45):

And it's because the court has too much power. It has power that supersedes Congress and immediately affects our lives. I live in Missouri, so I don't have bodily autonomy. I might look like I hold some kind of power in the world—I write books, I'm talking to you on this show, people listen to me about things—I don't have bodily autonomy and it's a very frightening thing. You know, it makes me afraid to go to the doctor even though I've done nothing wrong. It makes me afraid about, you know, what are in my text messages? It makes me afraid about my friends and my friends' daughters and all of our future. This is something that the state of mind that I am entering in, as somebody who's studied autocracy my whole life, as somebody who should be able maybe to word off the psychic hold, the chokehold on me, it's very difficult to do that.

Sarah Kendzior (13:37):

And that is the kind of framework that they wanna create nationally. That is what this radical right-wing Supreme Court wants to do. And so I just wanna stress to you that yes, of course, vote in the election. I have to say this too because I live in Missouri and they made a rule where it is illegal for a Missouri resident to register more than 10 voters. It cannot, as *Spinal Tap* said, go to 11. So I'm gonna clarify that I am not registering anybody right now. If you register to vote, don't blame me. I had absolutely nothing to do with it. I'm just freewheeling, as I said. I didn't plan anything, just shooting the shit about election stuff. So anyway, my point is, as you can see, we do not live in a full democracy and we need to try to preserve one.

Sarah Kendzior (14:27):

We need to try to create one. And so we need to look at the systems of power that exist outside of Congress, in part to try to stop them from taking our rights but also to build networks of community and support and protests and think creatively. Even if... you know, Biden has promised to codify *Roe v. Wade*, for example, if he gets two more senators. He promised that over the weekend. And so I kept thinking, Well, what if the Democrats lose the House though, and it doesn't even go to the Senate? You know, then that's nipped in the bud. But even if it does go through and they codify it, the Supreme Court can then shoot it down. So this is a crisis. I'm sorry to be captain bring down or whatever, but this is the

reality of the situation. And I don't want our country to go through what these women in Iran have to go through where they're being shot by police on the streets because they are fighting for their rights.

Sarah Kendzior (15:20):

And I don't want us to become conditioned anymore to accept this unfairness, to accept this brutality in the way that I can already feel my own mind becoming conditioned to live a life of fear because I'm a woman. So we need to support each other here. We need to get creative. We need to have backup plans for everything, like backup plans B through Z. Saying that you want a backup plan is not voter suppression, which is what some folks are saying on the internet. A backup plan is necessary when you live in a country with encroaching autocracy, or in some cases where there are already autocratic measures in place. Every marginalized group in America has had a backup plan for various situations. I have Black friends who, when they're driving around through certain areas, have backup plans in their mind about how they approach the police.

Sarah Kendzior (16:14):

They don't say to the police, "Oh, but we are a nation of laws" because they know they're going to be discriminated against. And, you know, this is true for everyone. This is why women run around clutching their keys at night because we know that if we're attacked, people might not believe us. This is an unfair country. So backup plans are good, vigilance is good, being creative is good, and having each other's backs are good. And that's basically all I have to say about that. We have lots of other stuff to discuss. Andrea, do you have responses to that or do you wanna go into something? Do we have anything less dire? Everything we have is dire.

Andrea Chalupa (16:49):

All dire, all the time. The backup plan is obviously what we always say on this show and what's in the *Gaslit Nation* Action Guide on our website, gaslitnationpod.com, which is do what you can wherever you live, build community wherever you live. It's so, so incredibly essential, especially as we head into the next 30 or so years, which is just going to be a time of constant change and constant displacement as the climate crisis hits and as Putins war and other wars by other dictators inevitably drag on. So what you need to really do is know your community, be part of your community, even if you have to start at yourself. Don't be afraid to start something yourself with your friends, even if you have to be unfashionable for a time, if you're alone and doing something. If you build it, they will come.

Andrea Chalupa (17:43):

If you build it, they will come. If you don't know where to start, go to the *Gaslit Nation* Action Guide on gaslitnationpod.com. It's just critical to do. One thing that I've observed over the years with the Russian resistance is that they sort of got around too late to the whole notion of running for local office or getting people in locally and organizing in a really big way; political parties, voting, getting out the vote, all those things. They came to it far too late and they lost a lot of time. Don't be like that. Start early. Acknowledge that as dark as things are, we still have a luxury of rights left in this country, obviously, compared to places like Russia and Iran. You have, as we just saw on the news, a Mussolini fan win an election and become the first female prime minister, likely, of Italy.

Andrea Chalupa (18:42):

This is somebody who thinks Mussolini is great, somebody that has deep ties to Steve Bannon. Steve Bannon was treating Italy like his own little Petri dish, fanning the flames of fascism. He was trying to get a fascist school off the ground. Authorities there put a stop to it, but he still was obviously successful in helping build a far right extremist coalition headed by Giorgia Meloni and they just won. She's going to

be the new leader of Italy. That's very scary stuff, right? So here you have Ukrainians for many years now since the revolution of dignity, Euromaidan in 2013-2014, all those protesters rose up and stood off face to face with the riot police, government snipers by Yanukovich, the Trumpian Putin puppet of Ukraine who fled to Russia. You had Ukrainians giving their lives to join the European Union to be part of Europe.

Andrea Chalupa (19:42):

And here you have Italians basically threatening that experiment of the EU. Here you have enough Brits who voted to leave the EU. You have Hungary becoming an autocracy, dictatorship-lite, enough Hungarians are voting for that. For what Ukrainians as we speak are giving their lives for. So never, ever, ever take for granted whatever you have left. Don't stay in your despair too long. You can feel despair. Despair is okay. It's a healthy reaction to how overwhelming things are today. But don't stay there. Don't stay there. Be like the Ukrainians and rise up and fight with whatever resources you have. Make the most of wherever you are. That's the Ukrainian way of doing things. Don't be like the Russian way of doing things where you fall into a doom spiral of nihilism where nothing matters. Anything you do. What's the point?

Andrea Chalupa (20:31):

Before recording this, I was on the phone with a friend from Russia and I kept asking, "What's the Russian diaspora doing? What are you guys up to? How are you helping the fight? You know, what are you guys doing?" The Russian resistance is in shambles. It's in really bad shape. It's never been worse. Putin is at his weakest. But the Russians in the diaspora, which have been growing larger in numbers since this whole brain drain has been going on over the last two decades of Putin's corruption. It's obviously getting worse, as we see in the news with Russians fleeing abroad when the war first started—the big genocidal war earlier this year—and now fleeing abroad in even larger numbers as mass mobilization (a Russian military draft) has been launched.

Andrea Chalupa (21:18):

You would think all of those Russians fleeing abroad into democracies across Europe and North America, you would think that they would regroup and try to take back their country, that they would energize themselves. No, it's been not that at all. At all. There's no equivalent of Ukrainian groups that are like that, that have been blooming since Euromaidan and just growing stronger. There's no Russian equivalent to those efforts. I think it's shameful. I don't think there's any good excuse for it and when I press my Russian friends with, you know, "What the hell you guys doing?", I'm met with just despair and nihilism. When you talk to Ukrainians, I'm met with excitement, civic spirit, a feeling of, "We have to fight. We have no choice but to fight" and this larger spiritual religion of freedom, this idea of freedom and self-reliance. Just this feeling of a total defiance. And that's where you have to be, even when the odds are against you. Even when people are trying to wipe you out and deny your very existence. You have to absolutely be defiant. Wherever you are in the world, whatever you're working with, be defiant. Be defiant. Stare into that disgusting face of evil and just stare it down and be defiant. And just the fact that you exist is enough that matters. Now shine your light out there and join with others. Together, your light will be stronger.

Sarah Kendzior (22:29):

Yeah, 100%. I think "be defiant" is great advice. I think "be defiant" is active advice and it's a jolt against the sort of hope-ium that's often peddled, the sort of passivity where you just sit there and wait for a savior and everything works out fine. You know, I think what we're seeing in Russia, it reminds me a lot of what I saw in Uzbekistan during the Karimov regime. He was the original dictator of Uzbekistan. He started out as a Soviet apparatchik, became the first and only president of independent Uzbekistan until

he died in 2016. And just like Putin, just like any dictator who's left in power for a long time, he became more paranoid, more insular, the country fell into shambles, it was collapsing economically before his death. But what was sad and interesting to me, you know, what I was looking at when I was a graduate student was how it affected the mentality of people in Uzbekistan.

Sarah Kendzior (23:25):

And it's sort of wild. The term "woke" has entered the American vernacular. It came from Black Americans who very badly wanted the rest of the country to learn accurate history, to understand systemic racism and injustice. When I would translate from Uzbek into English, what they were trying to do, the word that I would end up with is "woke". They would want people to be woke. And so this is how I was describing the desire from Uzbek dissidents for the rest of their population because they felt like everyone was in kind of a stupor, but it was more of a stupor like what Andrea's describing with Russia; a kind of nihilist, "none of this matters, we're just sort of..." in Uzbekistan a lot of it was just about survival, but it was also a sense of like, "Even if we do things, why bother?"

Sarah Kendzior (24:13):

"This is just not what we do." I'm very opposed to this idea that a lot of psychologists have that there is such a thing as an innate authoritarian mindset, that people are just born with an "authoritarian personality". I don't think that's true. I think people change. I think nothing is predetermined. It's certainly not biological in any way. But I do think that when you grow up in a dictatorship, when you grow up in a certain kind of culture where the incentive is to be asleep, the incentive is to be in a stupor, then an authoritarian mindset can settle in. And it's a combination of fear and complacency. And so you have an obligation to yourself to not give into that, you know, to remain vigilant, at least in your mind.

Sarah Kendzior (25:03):

You may, if you live in a dictatorship, you know, you go through the motions of what the state wants you to do for your own survival. And I feel terrible for people who have to do that. It is not easy to get out into the streets. You can and you'll just get shot to death. That is what is happening in Iran now. But the mentality though, your imagination and your vision of morality and your expectations, those are what you can control. And if you keep, them when there's an opening—when there is a political opening—that is when you can use it. And maybe Andrea you could give your thoughts about whether there is a political opening now in Russia that is not being used, because to me it looks like there is, you know, that Putin has become weaker. He's losing a disastrous war. He's lost the support of ethnic minorities within Russia; Dagestanis and others who don't wanna be recruited into an evil and losing military project. This seems like the time to rise up. It seems like maybe there'd be some support. And then the question becomes, Why not?

Andrea Chalupa (26:05):

I wanna start this by pointing out that when people in the West see the brave Russians that dare to go out in the street and protest, and there's always this attitude of, "Wow, they're extraordinarily brave." And that is absolutely true, without question, because these guys are getting rounded up and arrested, many of them beaten, and it's just sadism, right? The sadist riot police in Russia. It's extremely brave what they do and I've always said on this show that, at the same time, even before Russia invaded, Ukrainians, like Russians, had their share of brutal repression against them by the state. You'd have Ukrainian journalists murdered, Ukrainian opposition figures and activists attacked, murdered, killed, brutal images circulating across Ukrainian social media of horrific things done to Ukrainians that dared to speak truth to power, dared to stick their neck out, dared to take on corrupt forces. You had all sorts of violent corruption that

Ukrainians have been up against since attaining political freedom from Russia with the end of the Soviet Union.

Andrea Chalupa (27:12):

So what is the difference? Why was Ukraine able to finally break through and achieve a democracy where for so long Russians did not. With Russians versus Ukrainians, Ukrainians would have a protest. They wouldn't just go out into the streets, they would live in the streets. They would stay camped out in the bitter cold of the winter months for weeks, months on end, however long it would take. And they did that twice in large enough numbers in two different revolutions; in the Orange Revolution, 2004 and the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-2014. With Russians, they would protest and then they'd go home. There's never any camping out in the street. There's never any full-on pitch fiery battles with the riot police. And Ukrainians attitude now—when you read Ukrainian social media with Ukrainian journalists and activists—they watch the protests in Russia and where we as an American audience would go, “Oh my gosh, that's so brave of those Russians.”

Andrea Chalupa (28:14):

The Ukrainian observers will look at the Russians and say, “You guys are amateur hour.” And you have to understand why Ukrainians feel that way when they see the Russians protesting and they see amateur hour. They see Russians running from the riot place. Me, personally, I don't know what I would do. I don't wanna make judgment on people when I haven't even been anywhere close to that situation. But I'm just saying from a Ukrainian perspective, the Russian resistance isn't brave to them. They see the Russian people, the average Russian, as zero help in the fight against fascism. They see them as how we, Americans, might see Merrick Garland, like, “Where the hell are you? Why aren't you doing your job? Why aren't you pulling your weight? Why aren't you pitching in? Why can't you do the bare minimum?” That's how you Ukrainians see Russians.

Andrea Chalupa (29:02):

And it's extremely important for people to understand that because there is a big question mark around the Russian people, right? Because yes, Putin is incredibly weak. He's never been weaker. He's losing control of a war that he's losing at great financial cost to the entire country, especially his oligarchs. He's isolated. He has Russia and India who are like the only powers really that will do business with him scolding him on the global stage. He's going through all sorts of humiliations, which we listed in the last episode, and now he's unleashed the chaos of a major mobilization, which he dared to call—in a true Kremlin gaslight fashion—a “partial mobilization”. No, it's a full mobilization. They're claiming they need 300,000, but other documents show that they're gonna go up to a million Russians. They're gonna go up to a million Russians that they're gonna force over there.

Andrea Chalupa (30:00):

Right now, they keep dipping from the same damn well, which is the ethnic republics trapped inside Russia. These are regions of Russia that could be basically their own countries if it wasn't for Russian imperialism. There are republics that have their own language, their own unique history, culture independent from Russia. They have their own like personal identity, their own cultural saints, if you will, that they worship. They're unique from Russia through and through and they're basically just cursed, like Ukraine, by geography. They've been swallowed up by the Russian imperialist machine and then that's basically now all they know. They've been colonized mentally, physically, and they speak Russian. And many of them, like Dagestan, have been forced to send their young boys over to Ukraine to be slaughtered. And so when Putin is going to grab all the bodies he needs—because remember, in dictatorships, the dictator wants to own you mind, body, and soul—

Andrea Chalupa (31:03):

So when Putin goes and snatches all the bodies that he needs to send them into a meat grinder, he's essentially at the same time committing genocide against all of these ethnic republics that Russian imperialism has swallowed up. It's like a twofer, right? He gets to not only commit genocide in Ukraine, but genocide back at home with all these ethnic republics that might otherwise rise up against him because they're tired of the imperialism. They're tired of being subjected to that. They have a stronger push inside of them, a larger identity that they're not a part of this Russia and they wanna break free. As we've send the show for years, Putin's fascism, Putin's strongman persona, it's a gravity holding Russia together and the average Russian in St. Petersburg and Moscow fears these republics, fears the civil war that could break out if these republics finally decided to reject Russia in a really big way and fight back and launch some armed uprising.

Andrea Chalupa (31:59):

So this mobilization is putting undue stress—just a massive amount of brutality—on these republics. And that's when you're seeing the biggest pushback. There's big old riots against the mobilization in Dagestan for instance. Chechnya, the war lord who's supposed to be Putin's puppet in Chechnya is saying, “Hell no, we're not gonna send any more people.” So the republics that have been bled dry by the first round of the war so far are saying, “Enough is enough already. We're not doing this.” And then you have all the rich Russians, the hipsters in Moscow in St. Petersburg, they're the ones that can afford to buy all those overpriced plane tickets to Turkey, Abu Dhabi, Georgia, wherever the hell they can go. Those plane tickets sold out instantly when Putin announced mobilization. They were being completely inflated in price because there are just so few flights left, right?

Andrea Chalupa (32:49):

People were paying thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars just to fly out of Russia. You had borders that were overwhelmed by Russians driving, trying to get into countries like Georgia. And so, you know, these aren't necessarily people that are against the war. They can be absolutely in favor or indifferent to the genocide in Ukraine, but once it impacts them, they're not willing to die for it. They don't wanna be can fodder because Russia's losing this war. Russia's military is absolute shit. It is a victim of Putin's corruption. Putin and his cronies have been just stealing from the state everywhere they can for the last 20 years. And as a result, you have these mobilized Russian soldiers who are being handed ancient, rusty rifles that should be in museums or civil war reenactments or whatever. They're being given essentially movie props to go defend themselves in this country of Ukraine, which is being backed by the rest of the world.

Andrea Chalupa (33:47):

And so what is Putin's strategy? What is the one strategy he has left? Because he's just some lame KGB thug that's got this caveman mentality just clubbing people over the head. Well, the only military strategy Putin has left is to attempt to overwhelm Ukraine with meat for the meat grinder. That's all he is going to do. He's going to attempt to spend the next year or so sending around a million Russians to their death in Ukraine and he will be able to find those bodies. Bodies will go willingly for him because enough of these Russians have been so beaten down, so abused, can easily just get kidnapped by the state. They've basically allowed themselves this enslaved mentality. They've allowed their body in their mind to be enslaved to this dictator. And they'll willingly go. Enough of them will willingly go. They'll be able to get a million to go.

Andrea Chalupa (34:39):

I just wanna point out big exciting news. Edward Snowden got Russian citizenship. And the timing, of course, is perfect because Russia has their big old mobilization. Russia officially says one thing, but does the other. They're saying, "Oh, we're not gonna take you unless you have military service. Oh, we're not gonna take the students." All of it is bullshit, obviously. They've been arresting people off the street and handing them draft... When people are protesting against the mobilization, they've been snatching some of these people, arresting them, handing them draft notices. So they're just desperate to make their quota of a million bodies to send into the meat grinder in Ukraine. And you know what? Given how things really work in Russia, Russian citizen Ed Snowden, he totally qualifies to be sent into the meat grinder. I'm just pointing that out. This is a new kind of warfare against Ukraine.

Andrea Chalupa (35:32):

Keep in mind, by conservative numbers, Ukraine has either killed or injured around 80,000 Russian troops. Around 80,000 Russian troops. If Putin sends a quarter of a million to a million into that furnace, that's gonna create all sorts of problems for Ukraine. Think about the POWs. Now Ukraine has to feed and house and take care of a massive number of Russian soldier POWs. Ukraine is going to need medical care for all of those injured Russian POWs. Imagine all the corpses left out in the battlefield. The Russians don't claim they're dead. They leave their dead behind. They leave their dead behind for the most part. That's what we've been seeing in reports out of Ukraine. What kind of like disaster is that gonna create for Ukraine? So Putin's strategy, because he has no other strategy, and keep in mind Putin himself—like Hitler, who also lost a war—Putin, who has no military experience, Putin is overseeing the war.

Andrea Chalupa (36:32):

Putin is like the number one. All decisions start an end with Putin now in overseeing the war strategy in Ukraine. And what he's doing, like a typical KGB sadist, is he's just kidnapping bodies and sending them out to the meat grinder just to overwhelm the enemy, thinking that's gonna work. And all it's gonna do is create more mass graves. More mass graves and more mouths for Ukraine to feed and take care of. It's not a winning strategy by any means. It's just going to prolong the war, increase Putin's pain and destabilization back at home. And it's going to create a lot of problems for Ukraine. Unfortunately, it's just gonna be awful. It's just gonna be a big mess. Does this mean the end of Putin? Because we're seeing what's happening in Iran. We're seeing what's happening to the theocrats, the Clarence Thomases in Iran. Is this a moment for Putin to be overthrown? The sad reality is that the average Russian unfortunately has had a century of really harsh conditions and a lot of state-inflicted abuse and there's probably a lot more that they could take. And so again, this goes to the start of the conversation, what's really frustrating for the average Ukrainian is that the average Russian is pretty much no help here when it comes to fighting fascism.

Sarah Kendzior (37:51):

The way I see it is basically Putin's goal with this war and just generally with his actions since coming into office at the end of 1999 is to rebuild the USSR. You know, whose dissolution he saw as the great tragedy of his life and just a great tragedy in general. I think now, over six months after his forecasted 48-hour takeover of Ukraine has massively failed, instead of rebuilding the USSR, he has decided to ethnically cleanse it. That is what, as you've pointed out from the very start, he wanted to do with Ukraine. And I think by doing these forced conscriptions of non-Russian native populations to the Russian Federation—Dagestanis and others who are resisting this draft—it's to purge them. He wants to purge Russia of especially its Muslim minorities.

Sarah Kendzior (38:47):

You're also seeing the surrounding countries, central Asian countries that used to send young men or they used to go to Russia to work as migrants because the economic conditions of their own countries were so dismal. They got the hell out of there because they were like, you know, one, It's a shithole country (as someone notably said) and two, we're gonna be drafted. We're going to be sent in the meat grinder as well and we're not even Russian. Although I've heard of some folks, you know, they did join the Russian army because they knew it got them a ticket to Ukraine and if they went to Ukraine, they might have a chance to actually be free and possibly go to Europe. So there's a lot of complex maneuvers going on there.

Sarah Kendzior (39:25):

But I think the situation of, one, the surrounding countries that were colonized by the Soviet Union, especially the central Asian states and the Caucasus and then also these native populations, is interesting because this is a long simmering problem. At the end of the collapse of the Soviet Union, a Kyrgyz writer, Chinghiz Aitmatov, he coined this term *mankurt*, which is basically a zombie, somebody who's become zombified because they have lost touch with their own history, their own ethnic homeland, their own identity to the point that they will target their own family members because they won't even recognize them because they don't recognize themselves. They have been so thoroughly brainwashed by the state. And this is of course after decades and decades of Russians, ethnic Russians at the top, from the Kremlin, from Moscow, pushing this idea of *sovetskiy narod*, the world of the Soviet people, as if Soviet is an ethnic category, then pretending that everybody is an equal under this ethnic category.

Sarah Kendzior (40:34):

But they had a very clear hierarchy where people from Central Asia and the Caucasus were at the bottom. Ukraine was kind of this mixed bag as a slavic country, but as Andreas has pointed out many, many, many times, they have always viewed Ukraine as an extension of their territory, as subordinates, as a potential threat, as people who needed to be held down. They certainly viewed people in the Baltics as those who needed to be held down. All these countries were invaded. This was not some natural progression where everybody wanted to be controlled by Moscow. And so this is like a century of historical memory and people who now have access to communications with other repressed peoples from the former Soviet Union, people who may be from different backgrounds but they're in the same boat in the sense that the Kremlin views them as inferior beings and views them as potential cannon fire to be used against another former Soviet country of Ukraine that they are mercilessly invading in a pathetic way, but in a brutal way.

Sarah Kendzior (41:35):

there are mass graves and none of that should be forgotten, that yes, they are losing this war but this war has had an enormous number of victims and destruction and suffering and refugees. And so I look at Putin and it chills me because, you know, I said this once about Trump: He would rather destroy the world—and destroy the United States certainly—than have himself defeated. Human life means nothing to him. And with Putin, I didn't quite think that was true because he's an imperialist and he wanted to expand Russia's strength. That's why he was invading other countries. But he's a Soviet imperialist. He wants the Soviet Union back. I'm not sure Russia in its own right means enough to him to get out of this mentality of just sheer brutal destruction as long as he personally survives it along with his inner circle, which have become further and further away from him because he, like all dictators there for decades, has become more paranoid and insular.

Sarah Kendzior (42:42):

As long as he survives, I don't think he even cares in the traditional sense anymore. And that means... I mean, it could mean a lot of things. It could mean maybe he'll leave. It could mean he ratchets up the use of certain weapons. I don't know. I'm not gonna prognosticate. We're looking at potentially a big shift and I think a lot of it comes from people who've been brutalized and colonized putting their foot down and saying, "No, we're absolutely not doing this for you." and then the Kremlin realizing that they don't have the loyalty of the population. They have just subjugation and they have people openly revolting at that subjugation.

Andrea Chalupa (43:23):

And I think it's worth soul searching and understanding for the Russian communities out there. So for instance, in our end credits, we call on people to donate to Razom for Ukraine at razomforukraine.org because they're doing essential work for humanitarian efforts for Ukraine. They're extremely well organized. They're grassroots. They're hands on. I watched the birth of Razom. Razom came to be during Ukraine's Euromaidan. That was when the Ukrainian government was in the hands of Viktor Yanukovich. It was just a group of friends and strangers and just people just in an emergency room setting, just building something outta nothing. And Razom, over the years, has had so many incredible events, basic simple events like how to use social media, how to write an op-ed for your newspaper, how to do fundraising, how to do crowdsourcing, how to overcome the Soviet mentality that many in post-Soviet states were born with, raised on, grew up with; how to kick that, how to free yourself of that.

Andrea Chalupa (44:22):

All of these really interesting fascinating events and fashion shows, art shows, film screenings, book readings, you name it. They just built that themselves. There is absolutely nothing in the US that's the Russian equivalent of that. Nothing. Nothing. And I talked to a Russian friend, as I said, before we started taping and was like, "Where is your Razom? Why hasn't there been a Razom on the Russian side of things?" And he was like, "Oh, because we don't get along." You think Ukrainians get along? My husband has said that every single member of my Ukrainian family is the emotional equivalent of one Sicilian family. It's like that slavic hot blood or whatever. But when it comes to an existential threat like the Kremlin, we all get into gear and unite. We put our differences aside and so on.

Andrea Chalupa (45:13):

You know, over the years, I have been embraced and worked with wonderful Russian activists who've taken great risk. I paid tribute to the Russian resistance in my film, *Mr. Jones*. There's a character who is killed with four bullets in his back and that is, of course, a Boris Nemtsov tribute because that's how he was killed in the shadow of the Kremlin; with four bullets in his back. There've been wonderful Russians that have worked with Razom and so on. They need more support. They need more numbers. Fortunately, you have Garry Kasparov and his group. You have Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the Russian oligarch who had his fortune liquidated, was thrown to prison, and now he is forced to live abroad. You do have some efforts, but there isn't any sort of like grassroots, bottom-up rallying. Of course you have Navalny's group and they're trying to do God's work.

Andrea Chalupa (46:03):

Navalny's people keep saying, "Please US, please, EU, please sanction these 6,000"—6,000! 6,000 Russians that are part of the corrupt architecture that's holding Putin and power today. 6,000. So we should listen to groups like Navalny's group when they tell us who to sanction. And we should be more active in doing that and doing our part. So I do think it's a twofold thing that we in the US and anywhere in the world need to do more to support the Russian resistance. That includes just basic services; immigration services, security services, but also help them overcome whatever mentality, whatever lack

mentality, whatever fear mentality that they brought with them from living in a dictatorship. I think that's an important part of the support we should give all of these Russians that are now rushing abroad right now. But there is also something deeper there that the Russian people need to soul search themselves.

Andrea Chalupa (46:55):

And I think it comes from the fact that they were the top dog. They were the ones that benefited psychologically from empire. It was the Russian language that was forced onto the captive nations for a hundred years in places like Estonia, Lithuania and Ukraine and elsewhere. The, the Russian people were held up as the model citizen, as the great power in a Russian empire. And so maybe part of this, a part of this, is that there is a bit of entitlement and privilege, whereas groups that have faced genocide, who have been told that they must erase themselves, they must erase their language, they must erase their culture, they must erase their poets and their artists and so on, they cannot speak their mother tongue, those groups have faced an existential threat, just like non-white people in America.

Andrea Chalupa (47:48):

When you face an existential threat, it forces you to be a smart organizer. Just like Black women are on the front lines of protecting our democracy and being the pillar of the Democratic Party, right? When you are faced with that existential threat, when you're told that you don't have a right to exist, suddenly you need to do what you can to be the best organizer possible for yourself and your community in order just to survive. And maybe the Russians for so long have sort of coasted (some of them) on this mentality of being the empire, being the power, being a superpower, being the mysterious great Russian mind that a lot of people around the world have always looked to in terms of culture and arts and so forth. And maybe it's just that entitled privileged mentality is keeping them back from doing the necessary work in order to survive. Because right now Russia, just like Ukraine is facing an existential threat, Russia as we know it is facing an existential threat. If you mobilize a million Russians, the vast majority poor, many of them from these ethnic republics, what's going to happen? You're going to basically create a tension across the country that could lead to Russia itself breaking apart.

Andrea Chalupa (49:08):

Our discussion continues and you can get access to that by signing up on our Patreon at the Truth-teller level or higher.

Sarah Kendzior (49:18):

Pakistan has been decimated by record floods and people need help. To help the victims of the floods, donate to Pakistan Emergency Flood Aid at www.launchgood.com/campaign/pakistan_emergency_flood_aid. Climate and economic crises are everywhere, so please consider supporting your local food bank as well.

Andrea Chalupa (49:44):

We encourage you to help support Ukraine by donating to Razom for Ukraine razomforukraine.org. We also encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan. Donate at rescue.org. And if you wanna help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to the Orangutan Project at theorangutanproject.org.

Gaslit Nation is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review on iTunes. It helps us reach more listeners and check out our Patreon. It keeps us going.

Sarah Kendzior (50:20):

Our production manager is Nicholas Torres and our associate producer is Karlyn Daigle. Our episodes are edited by Nicholas Torres and our Patreon exclusive content is edited by Karlyn Daigle.

Andrea Chalupa (50:33):

Original music in *Gaslit Nation* is produced by David Whitehead, Martin Vissenberg, Nik Farr, Demien Arriaga, and Karlyn Daigle.

Sarah Kendzior (50:39):

Our logo design was donated to us by Hamish Smyth of the New York-based firm, Order. Thank you so much, Hamish.

Andrea Chalupa (50:47):

Gaslit Nation would like to thank our supporters at the Producer level on Patreon and Higher...